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MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

SECRET

ACTION

June 7, 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARY KISSINGER

FROM:

W. R. Smyser *[Signature]*

SUBJECT:

Status of North Vietnamese Troops in Laos

We have received a CIA memo regarding the current status of North Vietnamese troops in Laos. It indicates that some troops have been withdrawn but that many remain. (See Tab B.)

Recommendation

That you sign the attached memorandum for the President. (See Tab A.)

Approve \_\_\_\_\_ Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

*HAK has  
sum. B*

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE  
INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

SECRET - XGDS

DECLAS - IMPDET; BYAUTH - HAKISSINGER

MEMORANDUM

2255

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

SECRET

INFORMATION

MEMORANDUM FOR:

THE PRESIDENT

FROM:

HENRY A. KISSINGER

SUBJECT:

Status of North Vietnamese  
Troops in Laos

CIA has sent us a memorandum that reviews the current situation of North Vietnamese troops in Laos. The memorandum gives the following facts:

-- Hanoi has reduced its forces in Laos from an estimated 83,000 in February, 1973, to a present level of 47,000.

-- The heaviest percentage cut has been in northern Laos, where North Vietnamese forces have been reduced from 22,000 to 10,000,

-- In southern Laos, on the other hand, the North Vietnamese forces have only been cut from 61,000 to 37,000.

-- This indicates that about three-fourths of all North Vietnamese forces in Laos are now in the southern panhandle and are principally occupied with sustaining the infiltration route to South Vietnam.

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CIA believes that Hanoi will probably maintain a sizeable military force in Laos although there are indications that at least some additional North Vietnamese units will be withdrawn permanently or during the upcoming rainy season. Hanoi wants to keep forces in Laos to sustain pressure on the Lao Government and to keep up the access routes into South Vietnam.

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We also have some indications that Hanoi is using its presence in Laos to exert pressure against U.S. bases in Thailand. A recent Pathet Lao statement charged that Thailand was violating the Laos agreements by permitting U.S. bases in its territory. It suggested that the situation in Laos would be calmer if U.S. bases in Thailand were closed. Other material out of Hanoi indicates that Thailand cannot count on improved relations with North Vietnam until American bases are closed or their use severely restricted. Hanoi is apparently still concerned about the threat implied by our bases in Thailand, but the North Vietnamese leaders seem to have concluded that they can generate more pressure against our presence in Thailand by keeping their own troops in Laos than by complying fully with the Laos agreements.

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**THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE**

June 4, 1974


Office of the Director

**MEMORANDUM FOR:** Major General Brent Scowcroft, USAF  
Deputy Assistant to the President  
for National Security Affairs

**SUBJECT :** Status of North Vietnamese Troops in Laos

1. Attached are three copies of a memorandum discussing the status of North Vietnamese troops in Laos and the reason Hanoi has not withdrawn them. This memorandum was produced at the request of Mr. Colby and has been coordinated within the Central Intelligence Agency.

2. We are sending copies to the other members of WSAG, to Secretary Schlesinger and to the Directors of DIA and INR.

  
George A. Carver, Jr.  
Deputy for National Intelligence Officers

Attachment

 Copies 8-10

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**SECRET**

June 3, 1974

## MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

Status of North Vietnamese Forces in Laos

1. The Laos Provisional Government of National Union was established on April 5th, 1974, marking the beginning of the stipulated 60 day period during which all remaining foreign troops were to be withdrawn from Laos. Since early April, all U.S. [redacted] have withdrawn, but less than 24 hours before the June 4th deadline, North Vietnamese troops on Laotian soil number an estimated 47,000\*, more than three-fourths of which are located in southern Laos (see table below). Of the total, 18,000 are combat troops -- including those in 6 infantry regiments -- and about 29,000 are logistics personnel.

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Order of Battle of North Vietnamese Forces  
in Laos (in thousands)

	<u>Total</u>		<u>North Laos</u>		<u>South Laos</u>	
	Jun 74	Feb 73	Jun 74	Feb 73	Jun 74	Feb 73
TOTAL	<u>47</u>	<u>83</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>37</u>	<u>61</u>
COMBAT**	18	37	6	16	12	21
ADMIN SERVICES	29	46	4	6	25	40

\* Includes personnel in antiaircraft units.

\*\* Since the February 1973 Laotian cease-fire our knowledge of Communist forces in Laos has steadily deteriorated. The volume of all source intelligence has dropped off significantly and as a result, we no longer have a timely and complete picture of Communist forces in Laos. Thus, it is possible that some North Vietnamese units may have withdrawn undetected.

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2. At the time of the Laos cease-fire, Hanoi had some 83,000 troops stationed in Laos, with most (61,000) committed to the protection and support of the North Vietnamese logistics system in the Panhandle. Since then, about 36,000 North Vietnamese military personnel have withdrawn from Laos to North Vietnam or to Communist strongholds in South Vietnam, reducing the strength of both combat and administrative services personnel by more than 40 percent. These withdrawals included the entire 316th Infantry Division from northern Laos, three infantry and nine antiaircraft regiments from the panhandle as well as 17,000 engineer and other logistics personnel.

3. There have been tenuous indications that other North Vietnamese logistic units in northern Laos may be withdrawing, but the moves could be part of a traditional rainy season drawdown. In southern Laos, there has been no recent evidence of impending North Vietnamese withdrawals on a permanent basis. Nevertheless, in the next month or so the Communists probably will temporarily withdraw additional rear services troops from the Laotian Panhandle as the rainy season takes full effect and logistic activity is reduced.

4. In any event, Hanoi probably will maintain a sizable military force in Laos. In northern Laos, recent intercepts indicate that one of the two remaining infantry regiments will remain there at least until October. To the south in Khammouane Province, [redacted] revealed North Vietnamese troops in the province will be permanently stationed there -- disguised as Pathet Lao (PL). In southern Laos, the logistic corridor is still an integral part of overall North Vietnamese capability to support their forces in South Vietnam, and it is almost certain that Hanoi will not abandon it. The continued maintenance of this system will require a large, permanent manpower commitment.

#### Why the North Vietnamese Remain in Laos

5. There are several reasons for Hanoi's determination to keep substantial numbers of its troops in Laos. The bulk of the North Vietnamese forces serve to support the Communist effort against South Vietnam -- Hanoi's number one priority in Indochina. Hanoi has spent the past year assiduously improving its road and infiltration system in the Lao panhandle, and there is little likelihood of Hanoi abandoning this area as long as the fighting continues in South Vietnam and Cambodia.

6. In northern Laos, the North Vietnamese presence enables Hanoi to exercise considerably influence over the PL. It also serves as a hedge against potential rightist military moves against the areas controlled by the PL or the new coalition government itself. Hanoi evidently plans to continue training, advising, and to some extent logistically supporting the PL until the North Vietnamese are convinced that their Lao clients can hold their own against the Lao Army and do reasonably well in future general elections.

7. For their part, the PL have shown no interest in having the North Vietnamese leave. For the time being, at least, a continued North Vietnamese presence is probably welcomed by the PL as protection for their political and military interests in the new coalition government.

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